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S A long-suffering, passionate supporter of AFL club St Kilda, Eric Bana has had his share of heart-break over the years. The comedian-turned-Hollywood superstar wasn't even born when the Saints won their one and only flag in 1966, but the under-achieving club has provided Bana with inspiration for what could be two of the biggest films of the year.

In the new, big-screen version of *Star Trek*, Bana plays Nero, a bloodthirsty Romulan driven by hate and made to wait 25 years for the vengeance he believes is his due.

"There is so much built up there," Bana says of the character, which sees him heavily tattooed and buried under layers of make-up and prosthetics.

"Twenty-five years of waiting around for his moment of vengeance — that kind of reminds me of myself as a St Kilda supporter. I have been waiting since 1966 for another flag. I need to enter my own time portal where I can discover that eventual victory."

Bana's other footy-flavoured project is *Funny People*, a Judd Apatow comedy due to open here in September. Bana plays a slightly mad Australian, opposite Adam Sandler and Seth Rogen, both of whom he tries to convert to our code by cavorting in footy gear

while making them watch a game on TV.

Director and writer Apatow had chased Bana for the part after seeing the actor's early comedy work. The man who shot to fame as lovable bogan Poida accepted with one proviso — that the character be Australian.

That Bana is in hot demand for varied, big-budget projects is testament not only to his versatility as



an actor, but also to his increasing clout in Hollywood. Since his still-riveting portrayal of criminal Chopper Read put him on the international map eight years ago, the Melbourne-born actor has worked with some of the biggest actors and directors in the business — from Steven Spielberg and

Ridley Scott to Brad Pitt and Natalie Portman — playing the lead in films including *Hulk*, *Munich*, *Lucky You* and *The Other Boleyn Girl*.

But even he was surprised when the *Star Trek* script landed on his desk. Not only was he not a Trekkie, preferring character dramas such as *The Godfather* and *The Deer Hunter* as a teenager, but he wasn't really even looking for acting work. Fresh from filming *The Time Traveller's Wife* opposite Rachel McAdams, he was planning to take a break from acting to finish editing his car documentary *Love the Beast*, released in March.

"It definitely wasn't a case of, 'It's *Star Trek*, I'm in,'" he says after the world premiere in Sydney.

"In fact, it was almost the opposite. I was very wary and my agent said, 'Before you say anything, just read it with an open mind'. I read it purely as a form of entertainment and even if it wasn't called *Star Trek*, I think I still would have done it. It held its own."

Like almost everyone else in the cast, Bana was lured on board by directing wunderkind JJ Abrams, the man behind TV's *Lost* and the film *Mission: Impossible 3*. The pair had been looking for something to do together, and Bana raves about his director's drive and enthusiasm.

"When you do stand-up comedy, audiences tend to take on a



# the warp factor

Australian comedian-turned-Hollywood superstar Eric Bana has played a wide range of roles — but he wasn't sure he even wanted to read the script for bad guy Nero in *Star Trek*, writes **James Wigney**

collective personality and every one of them is completely different and it's the same with a crew when you work on a film," he says.

"There is a collective energy and personality that usually emanates from the director, not the actor.

"This film was definitely a JJ set and it was a lot of fun — people were working their butts off, but they were happy to do it for him. He has a unique way of rallying the troops and getting the best out of them — the great positive energy that the film has was in the shoot as well."

Bana had a first taste of that responsibility when directing *Love the Beast*, about his love affair with his 1974 Ford GT Falcon Coupe. While he enjoyed the process and would like to direct more in the future, he describes the movie's release as "a massive weight off".

"As director it doesn't matter whether it's a small or a big film, it all feels the same when you are sitting down cutting all day every day.

"I cut for about 18 months, start to finish, and loved the process and had a great time doing it. It was hard, but the film ended up how I wanted it."

Bana has hit the global promotional trail for *Star Trek*, which after glowing reviews is shaping up to be one of the biggest hits of the year.

Similar trips in the past have had an unexpected side-effect for Bana, making him miss his early career in stand-up comedy, which was side-

tracked first by sketch comedy, then films.

"Sometimes, by the time you get to the end of a junket, on a good day you might get a really good bunch of people on a round table and you work up a bit of a routine that's down pat after a few weeks," he says.

"Sometimes my publicist will say as we walk away, 'That was actually really good', and I think, 'Hmm, I'm

**It definitely wasn't a case of, 'It's Star Trek, I'm in'. In fact, it was almost the opposite. I was very wary and my agent said, 'Before you say anything, just read it with an open mind'**

getting itchy feet again now."

Despite claiming not to enjoy being the centre of attention, like many stand-ups-turned-actors before him, Bana misses the immediacy of a live audience and the adrenaline rush of treading the line between success and failure.

"It's the ultimate creative ex-

pression," he says of doing stand-up comedy. "You are sitting by yourself somewhere and you come up with this idea and you jump up on stage and just do it.

"If it doesn't work you are embarrassed, and if it does work you get this huge laugh and it stays in. It's the ultimate editing process, because you are self-editing and no one is telling you what to do. When you go into movies it's the exact opposite — it's a give and take."

Bana admits to being a bit of an adrenaline junkie who finds it hard to sit still. He relishes his time with his family — wife Rebecca and two children, Klaus and Sophia — but reading a book or just hanging around, he says, don't put him in a good frame of mind.

The search for the next energy rush has been a constant throughout his career and his hobby of racing (he performed creditably in the Australian GT class race before this year's Australian Grand Prix).

"Nothing compares to the racing, because you are never fearing actual physical injury when you are on stage or in front of the camera," he says, laughing.

"And racing brings out a brutally competitive side in anyone, but it's all similar in the sense that you are attracted to a certain level of adrenaline, and when it peters out you go looking for it somewhere else."

**Star Trek opens in cinemas on Thursday. Review, Page 8**

## coming soon

### GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST

(M) Thursday

A bachelor is haunted by the ghosts of his past girlfriends at his younger brother's wedding. Matthew McConaughey, Jennifer Garner, Lacey Chabert, Michael Douglas.

### SAMSON & DELILAH

(MA) Thursday

The love story of two Aboriginal teenagers in a remote community in the Central Australian Desert. Rowan McNamara and Marissa Gibson.

### STAR TREK

(M) Thursday

JJ Abrams (*Lost*, *Cloverfield*) directs this chronicle of the early days of James T. Kirk and the USS *Enterprise*. Chris Pine, Eric Bana (pictured).

### SYNECDOCHE NEW YORK

(M) Thursday

A theatre director struggles with his work, and the women in his life, as he attempts to create a life-size replica of New York inside a warehouse as part of his new play. Philip Seymour Hoffman, Michelle Williams.

### THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX

(MA) Thursday

Story of the German terrorist group, The Red Army Faction (RAF), which organised bombings, robberies, kidnappings and assassinations in the late '60s and '70s.

### PREY

(To be classified) Friday

Six friends who head to the Outback on a four-wheel-drive adventure and unknowingly awaken a 5000-year-old curse. Natalie Bassingthwaite, Jesse Johnson.

### OBSERVE AND REPORT

(MA) May 14

A mall security guard and a surly detective join forces to catch a flasher. Seth Rogen, Ray Liotta, Anna Faris.

### ANGELS & DEMONS

(To be classified) May 14

Tom Hanks is back as symbolologist Robert Langdon, in another film version of a Dan Brown (*The Da Vinci Code*) novel. Ewan McGregor. Directed by Ron Howard.

### GOMORRAH

(To be classified) May 14

Five stories about people in Italy whose lives are touched by organised crime. Toni Servillo, Gianfelice Imparato and Maria Nazionale.

### THE JONAS BROS 3D

(G) May 14

Rockumentary mixing excerpts from the teen idols' Burning Up concert tour, including guest performances from Demi Lovato and Taylor Swift, with behind-the-scenes footage.

### LESBIAN VAMPIRE KILLERS

(MA) May 21

Two no-hopers (James Corden and Mathew Horne) find themselves stuck in a village where all of the women have been enslaved by a legendary vampire curse.

### NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM 2

(To be classified) May 21

This time it is the turn of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex, to come to life after dark. Ben Stiller, Amy Adams and Owen Wilson.

### QUIET CHAOS

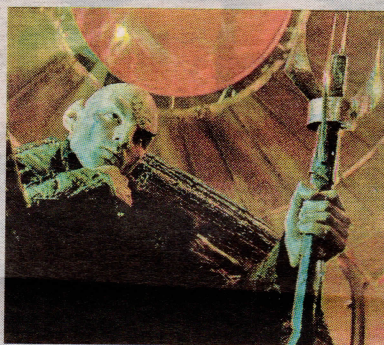
(MA) May 21

A father's life changes when he rescues a woman from drowning and loses his wife on the same day. Nanni Moretti.

### WHAT JUST HAPPENED

(To be classified) May 21

Comedy following two weeks in the life of a back-stabbing, middle-aged Hollywood producer. Robert De Niro, Sean Penn.



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